FROM TRADE GUILD TO ROYAL COLLEGE *

The Inaugural Address delivered to the Abernethian Society of St. Bartholomew's Hospital
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by

Professor Sir James Paterson Ross, K.C.V.O., LL.D., M.S., P.R.C.S., F.R.A.C.S., F.A.C.S.

IF YOU LOOK carefully at the inscription on the front of the Royal College of Surgeons of England—AEDES COLLEGII CHIRURGORUM ANGLICI DIPLOMATE REGIO CORPORATI, A.D. MDCCC.—you will notice that the word "ANGLICI" differs slightly from the others. Formerly the word had been "LONDINIENSIS" and the present appearance of the inscription provides visible evidence of the change in the title of the College which occurred in 1843. "The Royal College of Surgeons of London" was established by a Royal Charter granted by George III in 1800, and it may be assumed that this is as far back as one needs to go to understand the origin of the College. This, however, is a near-sighted view, and we must delve deeply into the history of the City of London if we are to obtain a true picture of the ancestry of the College, and of the events and developments extending over several centuries which led to the establishment of the College on its present site.

Accurate details of the history of London in the Middle Ages are not easily obtained, but it is clear that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was a steady growth in the size and influence of a "middle-class" of craftsmen who formed craft or trade guilds which were the predecessors of the City Companies. The guilds were started to regularise the practice of the particular calling; to lay down rules for the appointment, training and discipline of apprentices: to safeguard the rights and privileges of members; and to perform certain religious duties. They obtained the right of using a particular livery.

Such a guild or confraternity of surgeons was formed by the military surgeons who served in the Hundred Years War (1337-1444), but the earliest known charter concerning surgeons is that granted to the Barbers' Company by Edward IV in the year 1462. No doubt the Guild of Surgeons had little or no authority in the City because of its small membership—the records show that in 1491 there were eight, and in 1513 only twelve members—yet it is strange that the Barbers' Charter should deal almost exclusively with surgery, as though this craft were entirely in the hands of the Barbers. The charter states that the free men of the Mystery of Barbers (mystery is the same word as the French métier) had for long exercised "the Mystery or Art of Surgery, as well respecting wounds,

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bruises, hurts, and other infirmities of our liegemen, and healing and curing the same, as in letting blood, and drawing the teeth of our liegemen." It further stated that through the ignorance, negligence and stupidity of the unskilled " very many and almost infinite evils " had befallen our liegemen ; and so the Charter was granted for the purpose of remedying these evils, and charged the Company with the superintendence, scrutiny, correction and government of freemen of the City being Surgeons and exercising the Mystery of Barbers, and of all other foreign Surgeons practising in the City of London and its suburbs.

It may be asked how it ever came about that the practice of surgery was in the hands of the barbers. In the Middle Ages the clergy were the physicians, but as time went by the priests began to feel the competition of Jewish physicians and lay surgeons. The Jews were thwarted by their patients being excommunicated ; but all the Church could do to the lay surgeons was to brand surgery as an inferior and derogatory calling, and to forbid priests to undertake any operation which involved the shedding of blood. Rather than allow the control of surgery to slip from them the priests selected their servants, the barbers, who were known to be dexterous with sharp instruments, not only to shave their tonsures but also to be taught the surgical art under their direction. These pupils of the priests became Barber-Surgeons.

It has already been pointed out that the surgeons, though men of a better class and with attainments of a much higher order than the barber-surgeons, were too few to gain any authority in the City, so they attempted to establish themselves by union with the Physicians. A conjoint College of Physicians and Surgeons was formed in the City under the authority of the Mayor, but this arrangement proved unsatisfactory because the physicians, most of whom held University degrees, looked down upon the surgeons who were less well educated, yet were constantly striving to raise the standard of their craft and to inculcate high ideals in regard to responsibility towards their patients. As an example of this one may quote the regulations made about the middle of the fifteenth century, whereby four members of the Guild were elected Masters, whose duty it was to supervise the craft, to inspect apprentices, to punish malpraxis, and to be available for consultation in cases of serious illness—in fact it was an offence for a surgeon to fail to call in the Master under such circumstances.

The Conjoint College did not last long, but the surgeons were unable to exist alone and therefore agreed to combine with the Barbers. A charter was granted by Henry VIII in 1540 to the Surgeons and Barber-Surgeons, but it must be understood that the combined company consisted of Barbers, Barbers practising Surgery, and Surgeons. The Charter gave the Surgeons control over the Barbers practising Surgery, and by the rules of the Company surgeons were not allowed to practise shaving, and barber-surgeons were not allowed to do more than draw teeth. If

any of the barbers became surgeons it was only after some years of apprenticeship, attendance at lectures and demonstrations, and obtaining the Bishop's licence.

We see in the establishment of these Guilds and Companies a sense of high responsibility and a desire to set up good standards of service to the public or, as in this case, to patients. This is borne out not only from the study of the rules and records of the Companies, but also from the writings of their prominent members. To read these records of the thoughts and ideals of men of a by-gone age helps to keep us humble ; so often we may be inclined to think that because they knew less than we do, and their methods were more crude, that they must have been not only ignorant, but brutish. In fact, we have not out-grown their faults, and we cannot improve upon their noble ideals ; it was their fine character that has made their names survive.

The first Master of the Company of Barber-Surgeons was Thomas Vicary, Sergeant Surgeon to King Henry VIII and a Governor of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It is sometimes stated that he was Surgeon to the Hospital, but although he played an outstanding part in the life of the Hospital for many years, and may have exercised supervision over the duties of the surgeons, as over much of the rest of the work of the Hospital, he was not appointed one of the four surgeons to the hospital at the time of its second foundation. Vicary wrote *A Profitable Treatise of the Anatomie of Man's Body,* a book which had little merit as far as anatomy was concerned, since it was merely a translation of an ancient text, but is most valuable as an indication of what Vicary regarded as the attributes required in a man who would be a surgeon. " Four things most specially that every surgeon ought to have—

" The first, he ought to be learned and that he know his principles, not only in Chirurgerie, but also in Phisicke, that he may the better defende his Surgery ; Also he ought to be seene in natural Philosophie, and in Grammar, that he speake congruitie in Logike, that teacheth him to prove his proportions with good reason. In Rethorike, that teacheth him to speak seemely and eloquently ; also in Theorike, that teacheth him to know things naturall, and not naturall, and things agaynst Nature. Also he must know the Anatomie, for al Authors write against those Surgions that worke in mans body not knowing the Anatomie, for they be likened to a blind man that cutteth in a vine tree, for he taketh more or lesse than he ought to doo . . . it is as possible for a Surgion (not knowing the Anatomie) to work in man's body without error, as it is for a blind man to carve an image and make it perfyt.

" The second, he must be expert . . . he oughte to knowe and to see other men work and after to have use and exercise.

" The thirde, that he be ingenious or witty ; for al things belonging to chirurgerie may not be written nor with letters set foorth.

" The fourth, that he must be wel manered, and that he have al these good conditions here following—that a Chirurgeon must take heed to deceive no man, with his vayne promises, nor to make of a smal matter a great, because he woulde be accounted the more famous. . . . Likewise they shal give no counsayle except they be asked, and then say their advise by good deliberation, and that they be wel advised afore they speake, chefly in the presence of wise men. Likewise they must be as privie and as secrete as any Confessor of al thingis that they shal eyther heare or see in the house of their pacient. . . . And see they never prayse them selves for that redoundeth more to their shame and discredite than to their fame and worship ; For a Cunning and skilfull Chirurgion neede never vaunt of his doings, for his works wyll ever get credite ynough. Likewise that they despise no other Chirurgion without a great cause ; for it is mete that one Chirurgion should love another, as Christe loveth us al."

We begin now to understand what we mean when we say that the Royal College of Surgeons has inherited a great tradition, and why it is that we trace our origin back to the old Guilds.

Though the association with the Barbers gave the Surgeons more power in the City, it was otherwise to their disadvantage, especially in their relations with the Physicians, who regarded it as a sign of their inferiority and forbade surgeons to prescribe for their patients. Not till Abernethy's time did surgeons obtain this right. In spite of the special privileges which the Barbers allowed to their surgical brethren—for example, at meetings of the Court of the Company, after the general business was over the Barbers would withdraw and leave the Surgeons to discuss their own professional affairs in private—the union was on the whole an unhappy one and was dissolved in 1745, when the Surgeons were incorporated as a separate Company with their own Surgeons' Hall in Old Bailey. Here lectures were given in Anatomy and Surgery by Percivall Pott and later by his former pupil John Hunter, but as the century neared its close the affairs of the Company went from bad to worse. It was difficult to find lecturers and to obtain audiences for them ; interest was lacking in the general well-being of the Company ; and there were even complaints about the conduct of the examination of the Surgeon's mates for the Navy.

It is important to note the association of the Company with the Navy, for the Court not only examined candidates for the medical service but also acted as a tribunal to assess the claims made by Naval officers for compensation or pensions for wounds and " hurts." Among the treasures at the College of Surgeons there is the record of a claim made by Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson for his surgical treatment when he lost his arm. The anchor on the College Coat of Arms bears witness to this link with the Royal Navy.

It seems strange that interest in surgery should have flagged at a time when John Hunter was so busily introducing the method of experiment

into the study of surgery and placing the subject on a sure scientific foundation. It seems clear that although a few men like Astley Cooper appreciated his leadership the majority heedlessly continued to follow the old-fashioned empirical practices, and the teaching of surgery at Surgeon's Hall languished and finally died when the Company was dissolved in 1795. Within five years, however, the Royal College of Surgeons came into being, charged by Royal Charter with " the promotion and encouragement of the Study and Practice of the Art and Science of Surgery." The building of the College in Lincoln's Inn Fields was designed to contain John Hunter's museum and a library ; the greatly expanded museum and library are still among the principal concerns of the College to-day.

The original College buildings which were completed in 1813, soon proved inadequate to house the steadily increasing number of specimens which successive Curators, following the Hunterian tradition, were adding to the collection. The building was therefore enlarged in 1835, and again in 1855 and 1891, but the only departments represented were Anatomy and Pathology. In 1931 Sir George Buckston-Browne presented to the College a " Farm " adjoining Darwin's house at Downe in Kent, which consisted of a residence for research workers, farm buildings to house large as well as small animals, and a laboratory suite with an operating theatre. Excellent surgical experimental research was conducted at the Farm under the direction of Sir Arthur Keith, the first Master.

In 1937 a further extension was made to the College itself when, thanks to the generosity of the Bernhard Baron Trustees, another floor was added to the main building to accommodate a research department of Physiology. When war broke out in 1939 the activities of the College, which had been steadily increasing, were brought to a halt, and its treasures, the pictures, much of the library, and the most valuable of the Hunterian specimens were sent away for safe keeping in many parts of England and Wales. On the night of 10th-11th May 1941 the College suffered very serious damage in an air raid, and although the front of the building in Lincoln's Inn Fields was less severely affected all the museums on the Portugal Street side were completely gutted.

When building operations became possible after the war, the Council of the College decided that in order to provide for the expanding activities in the fields of post-graduate education and scientific research it would be useless to rebuild on the previous plan. Though the Hunterian Museum and the Library were still the chief concerns of the Council, accommodation had to be found not only for new museums but also for lecture rooms, demonstration rooms, and research laboratories in the departments of Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology and the newly-formed department of Pharmacology. Furthermore, the Faculty of Dental Surgery and the Faculty of Anaesthetists, both recently established, also required laboratory and office accommodation. These new departments, and the Nuffield

College of Surgical Sciences, which is a residence for eighty students, accounts for the enormous building operations now proceeding on the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Although the scientific departments are not yet properly housed, members of their staffs are already engaged on many problems which have a direct bearing upon clinical surgery. In the Anatomy department the minute structure of nerve cells is being studied using an electron microscope supplied by the British Empire Cancer Campaign. In the Physiology department most interesting work is being done upon the physical and chemical factors which influence the healing of wounds, and valuable electromyographic studies are being carried out on the muscles of mastication in relation to orthodontics. The vasomotor control of the nasal mucosa is being investigated with a view to elucidating allergic reactions in the nose. The Biochemistry sub-department is engaged in research upon lipid metabolism. The workers in the department of Pathology are carrying out research into carcinoma of the lung, and also into disorders of collagen formation, and in the department of Pharmacology important research is being done to study regeneration in the autonomic nervous system, and the effects of ganglion-blocking agents. At the Buckston-Browne Farm, work of fundamental importance has been done on skin grafting and on organ transplantation, and recently a team of research workers has been making excellent progress with the extracorporeal circulation.

One of the conditions on which the Hunterian Collection was delivered to the Company of Surgeons provided that " one course of Lectures, not less than twenty-four in number, on Comparative Anatomy and other subjects, illustrated by the preparations, shall be given every year by some Member of the Company." In spite of a promising start, as years went by history repeated itself and the difficulty of finding a suitable lecturer each year again led to the suspension of the lectures. Therefore application was made for permission to alter the conditions, and in 1894 the Lords of the Treasury agreed that each year one course of Lectures not less than twelve in number should be given by Fellows or Members of the College, and since that time applications for Hunterian Professorships have become steadily more numerous so that now there is intense competition for the twelve appointments and an astonishing amount of excellent material is offered by applicants, even by the unsuccessful ones.

There are many other named surgical Lectureships in addition to the Hunterian Professorships, and the College now has an organisation for arranging courses of lectures in surgery for post-graduate students at regular intervals throughout the year.

The College Departments of Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology and Pharmacology, also play their part in University education, as teaching departments in the Institute of Basic Medical Sciences of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation in the University of London. This intimate

association with the University enhances the academic status of the departments, and provides some very welcome financial assistance. It will be understood, therefore, that the cost of the educational programme does not fall entirely upon the College and its Fellows.

A function which the College has inherited from the Court of the Barber Surgeons' Company and from Surgeons' Hall is to " test the fitness of persons " to practise surgery. The Court of Examiners which is elected by the Council is entrusted with the maintenance of the high standard traditionally associated with diplomas granted by the College.

Let me repeat that the College was founded by Royal Charter and is justly proud of being a Royal College. It has been privileged and honoured by a close association with the Royal Family, and the visit paid by Her Majesty Queen Mary to see the effects of the bombing in 1941 is gratefully remembered. Many members of the Royal Family, including Her Majesty The Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, have graciously accepted the Honorary Fellowship, and the College was particularly favoured when The Queen laid the Memorial Stone of the new buildings just before her Coronation.

Finally, it must be realised that since the Royal College of Surgeons attracts post-graduates in large numbers from overseas, it constitutes and will always continue to maintain a vital link between England and the Commonwealth.

OVERSEAS VISITORS TO THE COLLEGE

RECENT OVERSEAS VISITORS to the College have included Professor R. M. Janes, Hon.F.R.C.S., of Toronto, Sir Arthur Sims, Commonwealth Travelling Professor for 1958, and Mrs. Janes, who stayed in the College on their way home from Africa : Dr. H. Rocke Robertson, who delivered a Moynihan Lecture in the College, and Mrs. Rocke Robertson of Vancouver : Mr. A. G. Jessiman, F.R.C.S., of the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston, who delivered a recent Hunterian lecture : and Dr. J. W. Pearce of London, Ontario, who attended the monthly dinner in May.

ANATOMICAL MUSEUM

THE SPECIAL DISPLAY for the month of June consists of specimens illustrating John Hunter's discoveries.

LIFE OF SIR GEORGE BUCKSTON BROWNE, F.R.C.S.

A BIOGRAPHY HAS been written of Sir George Buckston Browne, one of the greatest benefactors the College has had, by Miss Jessie Dobson, B.A., M.Sc., and Sir Cecil Wakeley, Bt., K.B.E., C.B., LL.D., F.R.C.S. The publishers are Messrs. E. & S. Livingstone and the price of the book is 25s. net.